

JAMES A. GARFIELD

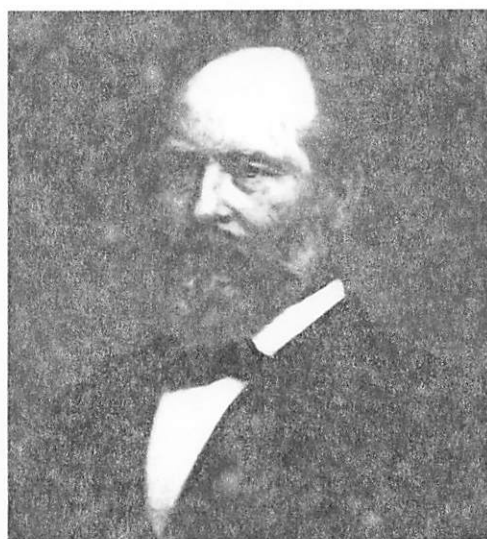
James A. Garfield



GRANT
18th President
1869 — 1877



HAYES
19th President
1877 — 1881



Oil painting on canvas (1882) by William T. Mathews;
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



The United States Flag had 38 stars
throughout Garfield's term of office.



ARTHUR
21st President
1881 — 1885



CLEVELAND
22nd President
1885 — 1889

20TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES 1881

GARFIELD, JAMES ABRAM (1831-1881), was the last President to be born in a log cabin. Nobody knows what kind of President he would have been, because he was assassinated only a few months after taking office. Garfield, a Republican, was the fourth President to die in office, and the second to be assassinated.

Possibly Garfield accomplished more by his death than if he had lived to complete his term. National politics in his day had sunk to a low moral level. Party bosses controlled huge political machines that bought votes and sold political favors. The spoils system turned thousands of government employees out of their jobs every time a new President took office (see SPOILS SYSTEM). Garfield spent most of his short time as President filling these jobs with his political supporters. Although not a reformer, he wrote in his diary shortly before he was shot: "Some civil service reform will come by necessity after the wearisome years of wasted Presidents have paved the way for it." His assassination by a disappointed job-seeker shocked the nation into action. Two years later, Congress began civil service reform by passing the Pendleton Civil Service Act.

Garfield was a big, athletic, handsome man with blond hair and beard. Before becoming President, he was successful as professor, college president, Civil War general, and U.S. Congressman. He spoke and wrote well, read widely, and even composed poetry. He occasionally entertained his friends by writing Greek with one hand and at the same time writing Latin with the other. Warmhearted and genial, Garfield wanted to be well liked, and generally was. But his eagerness to please everyone sometimes led him into questionable dealings with unscrupulous persons.

Early Life

Childhood. James Abram Garfield was born in Orange, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, on Nov. 19, 1831.

He was the youngest of five children. His parents, Abram and Eliza Ballou Garfield, were pioneers from the East. His father died before James was 2 years old. Mrs. Garfield managed to make a fair living on their 30-acre (12-hectare) farm. She became the first woman to attend a son's inauguration as President.

In his early teens, James began to do odd jobs during his vacations from the district school. At 16, inspired by reading adventure stories, he left home with the romantic idea of becoming a sailor on the Great Lakes. He gave up the notion when a ship captain cursed him and drove him away. A cousin then hired him to drive a team of horses that towed a barge along the Ohio Canal. During his six weeks on the canal, he recalled, "I fell into the canal just fourteen times and had fourteen almost miraculous escapes from drowning."

Education and Early Career. Soon James returned home, ill with malaria. When he recovered, he entered Geauga Academy in the nearby town of Chester. Following his first term, he supported himself by teaching in the district school. At 20, he enrolled in the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute (now Hiram College) in Hiram, Ohio, near Cleveland. He studied there for three years, then attended Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., for two years. Under the guidance of the president of Williams College, Mark Hopkins, Garfield matured greatly and broadened his interests. He later defined the ideal college as "a simple bench, Mark Hopkins on one end and I on the other . . ."

IMPORTANT DATES IN GARFIELD'S LIFE

- 1831 (Nov. 19) Born in Orange, Ohio.
- 1858 (Nov. 11) Married Lucretia Rudolph.
- 1862 Became youngest brigadier general in Union Army.
- 1862 Elected to U.S. House of Representatives.
- 1880 Elected President of the United States.
- 1881 (July 2) Shot by Charles Guiteau.
- 1881 (Sept. 19) Died in Elberon, N.J.

After graduation from Williams in 1856, Garfield returned to Hiram College as a professor of ancient languages and literature. The next year, at the age of 26, he was chosen president of the college. While president, Garfield studied law and occasionally preached sermons for the Disciples of Christ. He had joined that church as a youthful convert. He also delivered public lectures on such topics as "Geology and Religion."

Garfield's Family. On Nov. 11, 1858, Garfield married Lucretia Rudolph (April 19, 1832-March 13, 1918), the daughter of an Ohio farmer. She had been a student of Garfield at Hiram, and taught school while he completed his education. Garfield called her "Crete," and came to rely on her quiet strength. Later, when she was mistress of the White House, he wrote: "Crete grows up to every new emergency with fine tact and faultless taste." The Garfields had seven children, two of whom died as infants. One son, Harry Augustus Garfield (1863-1942), became president of Williams College, and served as Fuel Administrator under President Woodrow Wilson during World War I. Another son, James Rudolph Garfield (1865-1950), served as Secretary of the Interior in President Theodore Roosevelt's Cabinet.

Soldier. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Governor William Dennison commissioned Garfield a lieutenant colonel of Ohio volunteers. The young officer wrote home: "I am cheerful and happy as any one can be in such a fierce business as killing men." Garfield won a minor battle in Middle Creek, Ky., in January, 1862. As a reward, he was made a brigadier general, the youngest in the Union Army. He took part in the Battle of Shiloh and in the operations around Corinth. In 1863, as chief of staff under General William S. Rosecrans, Garfield distinguished himself in the Battle of Chickamauga by riding under heavy fire to deliver an important message to General George H. Thomas. He was promoted to major general after the battle.

Political Career

Congressman. Garfield had shown an interest in politics as early as 1856, when he campaigned for John C. Frémont, the Republican candidate for President. He was elected to the Ohio state senate three years later. In 1862, while still in the army, Garfield was

elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, although he did not resign his commission until December, 1863.

Garfield won reelection to the House eight times. He served as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and as a member of the committees on Military Affairs, Ways and Means, and Banking and Currency. He supported the harsh Reconstruction measures of the Radical Republicans, and voted for the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson (see RECONSTRUCTION).

In 1872, Garfield was one of several congressmen accused of accepting gifts of stock from the Credit Mobilier, a corporation seeking favors from the government (see CREDIT MOBILIER OF AMERICA). He denied the charge, and it was never proved. Garfield was also criticized for accepting a \$5,000 fee from a company trying to get a paving contract from the city of Washington, D.C. He admitted taking the fee, but contended that his services were not improper.

Garfield served on the commission that settled the disputed Hayes-Tilden election of 1876 (see ELECTORAL COMMISSION). He also helped draw up a bargain which gave the presidency to Rutherford B. Hayes.

During Hayes' administration, Garfield became floor leader of the Republicans in the House. The party was divided into two factions: the "Stalwarts," led by Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York, and the "Half-Breeds," led by Senator James G. Blaine of Maine. These groups quarreled over personal differences and government jobs rather than political principles. Though closer to the Half-Breeds, Garfield stood between the two factions and kept some of the confidence of both.

Election of 1880. The Ohio legislature elected Garfield to the U.S. Senate in 1880. But, before he could take his seat there, he led his state's delegation to the Republican national convention. The Half-Breeds tried to nominate Blaine for President. The Stalwarts insisted on former President Ulysses S. Grant. Neither Blaine nor Grant could gather enough votes for the nomination. The Half-Breeds then swung to Garfield, a "dark horse," or little-known candidate. The convention finally chose him on the 36th ballot. For Vice-President, the convention picked Chester A. Arthur, a Stalwart

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THE WORLD OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD

U.S. population was 51,500,000 in 1881. No new states or territories were organized during Garfield's short administration.

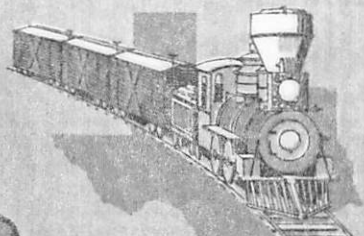


Garfield Was Shot on July 2, 1881, and died on Sept. 19.



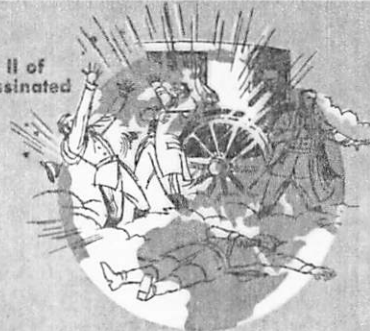
WORLD EVENTS

- 1881 Terrorists assassinated Alexander II of Russia.
- 1881 The French established a protectorate over Tunis.



Railroads Reached Texas in 1881, ending the famous cattle drives to Kansas cow towns.

Alexander II of Russia Assassinated



The American Red Cross was organized by Clara Barton.

